

Lenakel language

Lenakel, or **West Tanna**, is a dialect chain spoken on the western coast of Tanna Island in Vanuatu.

Lenakel is one of five languages spoken on Tanna. The native name for the language is *Netvaar*, and speakers refer to their language as *Nakaraan taha Lenakel* "the language of Lenakel".^[3] Lenakel has been extensively researched and documented by John Lynch, and both a dictionary and a detailed linguistic description of the language have been published.

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Classification

Lenakel is an Austronesian language of southern Vanuatu. Its closest relatives are the other four Tanna languages spoken on the island of Tanna. It is particularly closely related to the Whitesands language and North Tanna, the two languages closest in geographic space to the Lenakel language area. Although none of the languages of Tanna are strictly mutually intelligible, there is a high degree of lexical overlap, and the grammars of Lenakel, Whitesands, and North Tanna are nearly identical.^[4] Based on Swadesh list data, Lenakel was found to be 73-80% lexically identical to North Tanna and 75-81% lexically identical to Whitesands.^[5] Linguist D.T. Tryon has referred to the linguistic situation in Vanuatu as one of "language-chaining," a reference to Dialect continuum, the idea within linguistics that dialects exist along a continuum or chain within a language area.^[6]

Geographic distribution

Lenakel is spoken on Tanna, an island in the southern part of the 82-island chain comprising Vanuatu. It is spoken by between 8,500 and 11,500 people and is concentrated in the central west part of the island.^[7] Isangel, the administrative capital of Tafea Province, exists within the Lenakel language area, as does Lenakel, the largest city on the island of Tanna.^[8] There are significant Lenakel-speaking communities in other areas of Vanuatu, such as New Caledonia and Port Vila on the island of Efate.^[9]

Lenakel	
West Tanna	
Netvaar	
Native to	Vanuatu
Region	Tanna Island
Native speakers	12,000 (2001) ^[1]
Language family	Austronesian <ul style="list-style-type: none">Malayo-Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Oceanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Southern Oceanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">South Vanuatu<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tanna<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lenakel
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	tn1
Glottolog	lena1238 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/lena1238) ^[2]

Dialects

The dialect situation within Lenakel is complicated by the fact that native speakers of the language have differing opinions on whether or not closely related languages such as Whitesands and North Tanna are actually separate languages or whether they are dialects of Lenakel.^[10] Linguists such as John Lynch and Terry Crowley have suggested that further research is needed in order to more firmly establish dialect and language boundaries on Tanna.^[11]

The most reliable information to date suggests that there are up to ten dialects of Lenakel, including Loanatit, Nerauya, Itonga, and Ikyoo.^[12]

Lenakel is considered the most prestigious language spoken on Tanna,^[13] partially because it has been in use as a church language for over a century.^[14]

Phonology

The phonemic inventory is as follows:.^[15]

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
Close	⟨i⟩ /i/		⟨u⟩ /u/
Mid	⟨e⟩ /e/	⟨ə⟩ /ə/	⟨o⟩ /o/
Open		⟨a⟩ /a/	

The vowels have also been described as follows:

	front	central	back
high	i		u
mid	e		o
low		a	

Consonants

		Bilabial	Labialized	Dental	Lateral	Velar	Glottal
Plosive		⟨p⟩ /p/	⟨p̥⟩ /pʷ/	⟨t⟩ /t/		⟨k⟩ /k/	
Fricative	voiceless	⟨f⟩ /f/		⟨s⟩ /s/			⟨h⟩ /h/
	voiced	⟨v⟩ /v/					
Nasal		⟨m⟩ /m/	⟨m̥⟩ /mʷ/	⟨n⟩ /n/		⟨ŋ⟩ /ŋ/	
Approximant		⟨w⟩ /w/		⟨r⟩ /r/	⟨l⟩ /l/		

The consonants have also been described as follows:

	velarised bilabial	simple bilabial	alveolar	velar	postvelar
stop	p ^w	p	t	k	
nasal	m ^w	m	n	ŋ	
flap			ɾ		
fricative		ɸ	s		
lateral approximant			l		
semivowel		w			

Notes

1. Lenakel (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/tnl/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Lenakel" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/lena1238>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Lynch & Crowley (2001), p. 128
4. Lynch (1978), p. 1
5. Lynch (1978), p. 1
6. Tryon, D. T. (1976). *New Hebrides Languages: an internal classification* (<http://sealang.net/archives/pl/pdf/PL-C50.pdf>) (PDF). Pacific Linguistics Series C - No. 50. Canberra: Dept. of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University. p. 79. doi:10.15144/pl-c50 (<https://doi.org/10.15144%2Fpl-c50>). hdl:1885/145139 (<https://hdl.handle.net/1885%2F145139>). ISBN 0-858-83-152-X.
7. Lynch & Crowley (2001), p. 126
8. Lynch (1978)
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10. Lynch & Crowley (2001), p. 126
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13. Lynch & Crowley (2001), p. 128
14. Lynch, John (2001). *The Linguistic History of Southern Vanuatu* (<http://sealang.net/archives/pl/pdf/PL-509.pdf>) (PDF). Pacific Linguistics 509. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics. p. 5. doi:10.15144/pl-509 (<https://doi.org/10.15144%2Fpl-509>). hdl:1885/146106 (<https://hdl.handle.net/1885%2F146106>).
15. Lynch, John (1996). "Liquid Palatalization in Southern Vanuatu". *Oceanic Linguistics*. **35** (1): 77–95. doi:10.2307/3623031 (<https://doi.org/10.2307%2F3623031>). JSTOR 3623031 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3623031>).

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External links

- (in French and English) [Online lénakel dictionary and phrases with pronunciation recorded](http://dominicweb.eu/en/lenakel/) (<http://dominicweb.eu/en/lenakel/>)
 - [Resources in and about the Lenakel language](http://olac.lidc.upenn.edu/language/tnl/) (<http://olac.lidc.upenn.edu/language/tnl/>)
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